

# WISBECH RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

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## Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1904.

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*To the Chairman and Members of the Rural District Council of Wisbech.*

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to present to you my 31st Annual Report, compiled on similar lines to last year, in compliance with a Memorandum from the Local Government Board.

If, in the following Report, I again refer to conditions of the District already well-known to you all, and apparently unnecessary to mention, it should be remembered that these Annual Reports are for the information of the Local Government Board and County Council as well as of your Council, and that a statement of the local circumstances, and a history of local sanitary questions, which may seem superfluous to you, may often be needed and appreciated by the former bodies.

As you are aware, the old combined District of Wisbech was divided into the Rural Districts of Wisbech and Marshland on the passing of the Local Government Act of 1894 in order that each should be within its County's limits, and consequently I am unable to go further back than 1895 with the statistics required in the New Tables I. and II.

The following is my report for 1904:—

THE DISTRICT consists of eight parishes in the Isle of Ely, situated to the North, South and West of Wisbech, and has the general characteristic of Fen country geology, viz.:—A deposition of peat and silt on sand and gravel, which in turn rests on boulder clay. The configuration of the District is distinctly flat—no part rising many feet above sea-level. It is essentially rural in character, the density of population being one person to about every five acres. The only occupation followed is agriculture, which has now for many years been in a depressed condition.

VITAL STATISTICS.—Tables of Statistics are appended hereto, viz.:—The tables I. to IV. required by the Local Government Board, and a new table required by the Home Office under the Factory and Workshop Act of 1901.

POPULATION.—I have again estimated the population for the year on the Registrar-General's assumption that the rates of increase or decrease which obtained in the last decennial period will continue in this one, and the following rates are calculated on that estimated population, viz.:—8713 made up as follows—Leverington 5641, Elm 1804, and Upwell 1268.

BIRTHS.—259 births were registered, as compared with 238 in 1903, of these 124 were males, and 135 females. The birth-rate was 29·7 per 1000 living, and the natural increase, *i.e.*, the excess of births over deaths, 137.

DEATHS.—122 deaths were registered, as compared with 114 in 1903. These give a crude death-rate of 14·1 per 1000. This is ·6 above the average of the last nine years, and is partly due to extensive epidemics of Scarlet Fever and Whooping Cough.

AGE MORTALITY.—58 children under 5 years of age, and 33 old people over 65 years died during the year. These figures show the mortality at the extremes of life, and were respectively 40 and 30 in 1903, and 39 and 54 in 1902.

THE INFANT DEATH-RATE.—47 infants under 1 year of age died, as compared with 33 in 1903, giving a death-rate of 181·4 per 1000 registered births, and 5·3 per 1000 living.

ZYMOTIC DEATHS.—18 deaths (including 3 from Enteritis) were registered as occurring from the seven principal Zymotic Diseases, viz. :—(1) Small Pox; (2) Scarlet Fever; (3) Diphtheria; (4) Fevers—including Typhus, Enteric or Typhoid, and other continued Fevers; (5) Measles; (6) Whooping Cough; and (7) Diarrhœa.

THE ZYMOTIC DEATH-RATE derived from the above-mentioned diseases was 2·0 per 1000 as compared with ·6 in 1903.

#### NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

The Diseases notified in the District are those enumerated in the Infectious Disease (Notification) Act, 1889, viz. :—Small Pox, Cholera, Diphtheria, Membranous Croup, Erysipelas, the disease known as Scarlatina or Scarlet Fever, and the Fevers known by any of the following names :—Typhus, Typhoid, Enteric, Relapsing, Continued or Puerperal; and Plague. To this list you have added Chicken Pox, owing to the continued prevalence of Small Pox in the Country, and the similarity between the diseases, when the latter is modified by Vaccination. The Act has been in force since September, 1897.

SCARLET FEVER.—A wide-spread epidemic of this disease prevailed in the District during the greater part of the year, 106 cases were notified as compared with 39 in 1903. Of these 43 occurred in Leverington, 56 in Elm, and 7 in Upwell. Three cases in Elm and 1 in Upwell proved fatal.

DIPHTHERIA.—3 cases were notified, 1 in Leverington and 2 in Elm. All recovered.

ENTERIC FEVER.—3 cases were notified and all recovered.

SMALL POX.—One case was notified, but successful re-vaccination proved the diagnosis to have been inaccurate.

CHICKEN POX.—12 cases were notified, the chief incidence of the disease was in Leverington. None of the cases proved fatal.

ISOLATION.—There is available the Isolation Hospital of the combined Districts of Walsoken Local Board, Wisbech Urban, Marshland Rural, and your District, which contains 14 beds, and admission to which is practically free, as it ought to be, for removal to Hospital of infectious cases is done more for the public benefit than in the individual patient's interest. Seven cases from Leverington, 3 from Elm, and 1 from Upwell were removed to Hospital, these being about 10% of the total number.

DISINFECTION.—The houses of all notified cases are visited by the Inspector, disinfectants freely distributed, and on recovery or death the house is disinfected by the Inspector.

#### NON-NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

MEASLES was prevalent to a slight extent and 1 case proved fatal in the Elm Sub-District.

WHOOPIING COUGH.—Was very prevalent in the District in the early part of the year, and 5 cases in Leverington and 2 in Upwell proved fatal.

DIARRHŒA.—3 deaths occurred from this cause and 3 from Enteritis which may be classed as a kindred disease. This is not an unusually high number considering the long dry and hot Summer we experienced last year, and the fact that Diarrhœa is a disease of epidemic character, occurring chiefly in hot dry weather, and attacking hand-fed infants and old people.

#### OTHER DISEASES.

CANCER caused 10 deaths as compared with 7 last year. It is to be hoped that the numerous researches at present being carried out into the cause, prevention, and cure, of this painful and fatal disease may bear good fruit in the immediate future.

PHTHISIS caused 8 deaths as compared with 6 last year. This is a disease which there is every hope may be prevented and cured by isolation and treatment in specially constructed sanatoria and under—as far as we know them—perfect sanitary conditions.



For the sake of comparison I give the rates for Rural England and Wales, which have been provisionally compiled by the Registrar-General:—Birth-rate, 26·8; Death-rate, 15·3; Zymotic death-rate, 1·28; and Infant Mortality, 125.

#### GENERAL.

THE WATER SUPPLY.—A small number of the inhabitants derive their supply from the town mains, the water of which is obtained from the chalk formation; it is excellent in quality and abundant in quantity, being on the constant system. The vast majority of the people, however, have to depend on rain-water for their domestic supply, as the sub-soil water is grossly polluted by the necessary agricultural operations, and is in places even brackish. The rain-fall is collected in water-tight underground cisterns safe-guarded as far as possible from contamination.

THE SEWERAGE OF THE DISTRICT.—There is no system of Sewage Disposal, the houses for the most part being drained to cesspools. Some, however, still drain into the nearest dyke, but these are gradually being remedied. The excrement disposal is by means of deep privy middens, one of the most frequent sources of nuisance in the District, and which I have for many years advocated should be converted into pail closets. There is no public scavenging, the house refuse being disposed of in their gardens by the occupiers.

#### WORK DONE.

119 Visits of inspection were made during the year by the Inspector. This represents the abatement of many nuisances without formal notice, and in addition 5 were abated on orders from the Council. Certificates were granted for the occupation of 23 new houses, and 3 orders were made for the provision of water-tight cisterns for domestic water supply.

THE DAIRIES AND COW SHEDS as well as the SLAUGHTER HOUSES, KNACKER'S YARDS, and FRUIT PICKERS' BUNKS in the District have been inspected by the Inspector and myself, and generally found in a clean and satisfactory condition. In addition, I have made systematic inspection of the District in company with the Inspector, besides attending to any complaints received, and frequent inspections made when on my professional rounds.

#### THE FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT, 1901.

This Act came into force on January 1st, 1902, and requires me to report specifically on the administration of the Act in "Workshops" and "Workplaces" and send a copy of this Report to the Secretary of State. Unfortunately for the Wisbech Rural District the staple industry is agriculture, which continues in a very depressed state, and in the adjacent towns it is chiefly connected with the wholesale timber trade, and the making of agricultural implements, industries which do not put out "Home-work"; and as regards "Workshops" and "Workplaces" I do not know of any, other than the small village Bakehouses, Blacksmiths' and Carpenters' Shops, all of which are kept in a fairly good sanitary state. A list of these and all particulars required in connection with them, compiled from the Official Register, is appended hereto, in compliance with the requirements of the above Act.

Finally, I am responsible for the portion of this Report which deals with the period extending from January 1st to October 20th, and my successor—Dr. D. L. Davies—for that referring to the remainder of the year.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

**E. C. BURY,**

5, York Row, Wisbech,  
January 31st, 1905.

Late Medical Officer of Health.

